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ABSTRACT

The "Clipboard Connection" is a methodology to facilitate the rapid circulation of relevant pre-existing materials from Chapter 1 Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) to their clients, teachers of educationally disadvantaged children in resource centers. Each "Clipboard Connection" consists of a lead sheet summarizing the contents of the materials (reprints of journal articles, brochures, etc.) to be distributed, and the materials themselves. This compilation focuses on parents' role and involvement in their children's education. The materials included are the following take-home flyers, produced by the National Education Association: (1) "Thinking Skills: How Parents Can Help" (Marcia Heiman and Joshua Slomianko); and (2) "Writing: Parents Can Help" (Tim Gillespie). These materials also include ideas relevant to in-class instruction. (AF)

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The Clipboard
CONNECTION

May 1990

Chapter 1
Resource Center
Curriculum & Instruction

Parents
and
Instruction

"Thinking Skills: How Parents Can Help"

Increasingly, there will be curriculum changes in Chapter 1 programs by the inclusion of thinking skills teaching. Just as educators had to become more aware of what teaching thinking means, so must we also inform the parents of our students.

"Writing: Parents Can Help"

Children learn habits by modeling what they observe and copy around them. This flyer suggests a multitude of practical and easy means by which to provide encouragement for children's writing. The first, talking, is available to any adult and includes such simple activities as telling stories, discussing daily events, expressing feelings about experiences, talking about the television programs children watch, and retelling memories.

Both of these take-home flyers also contain ideas relevant to in-class activities. They are from a set of 29.

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how well they do, and there is generally no "right" answer. The teacher evaluates students' thinking skills to see where they are at a given time, and to see where they may need extra work.

Students' thinking skills might be evaluated orally or with a paper-and-pencil test. For example, a teacher might be interested in evaluating students' skills in analysis—a breaking-down process to find out how parts fit together to make a whole. Students might be asked to list the steps involved in solving a particular problem, or to break down a task (such as making a bed) into its component parts.

How Can Parents Help Their Children Think More Actively?

As a parent you can—

- Encourage your children to ask questions about the world around them.
- When reading to or with young children, ask them to imagine what will happen next in the story.
- Actively listen to your children's conversation, responding seriously and nonjudgmentally to the questions they raise.
- When your children express feelings, ask *why* they feel that way.
- Suggest that your children find facts to support their opinions, and then encourage them to locate information relevant to their opinions.

- Use entertainment—a TV program or a movie—as the basis of family discussions.
- Use daily activities as occasions for learning. For example, instead of sending a child to the store with a simple list of items to purchase, talk with the child first about how much each item might cost, how much all the items might add up to, and estimate how much change s/he should receive.
- Reward your children for inquisitive and/or creative activity that is *productive*.
- Ask your children what *questions* their teachers are raising in class. For example, a history class might be "asking" how American westward expansion began.

Remember, if your children are active participants in a home where there is talk about the *why* and the *how* of things, they are more likely to be active thinkers both in and out of school.

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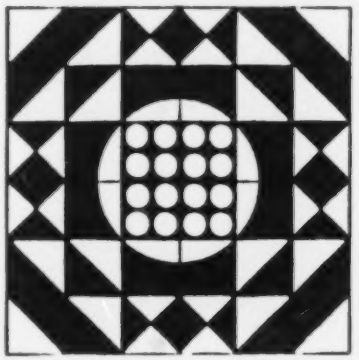
Thinking Skills: How Parents Can Help

by Marcia Heiman and
Joshua Slomianko



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What Is Meant by "The Process of Thinking"?

Thinking and being aware of our own thoughts are skills that make us human. Thinking is an active process. It encompasses events that range from daydreaming to problem solving. It is a kind of ongoing, internal dialogue that accompanies actions like performing a task, observing a scene, or expressing an opinion.

What Does "Teaching Thinking in School" Mean?

The "teaching thinking" movement goes beyond the learning of facts. It encourages students to ask questions of the information and ideas presented in class. It helps students learn how to identify unstated assumptions, to form and defend opinions, to see relationships between events and ideas.

There are many approaches to teaching thinking. Some educators teach students to use a set of identifiable skills—such as discriminating between relevant and irrelevant points in a particular argument, or generating questions from written material. Others try to involve students in classroom experiences that will help them think more actively—such as a classroom debate or a mock court case.

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What Are Some Examples of Thinking Skills Instruction?

Thinking skills instruction can be applied to all areas of the curriculum. Here are some examples of teaching these skills in the classroom:

- In an American history class, students might use a simulation exercise to understand the points of view of the colonists and the British at the time of the Revolution. That is, after studying background information, students would play roles of persons on both sides of the conflict, debating the issues as they reflect their imagined families, work, and community.
- In a mathematics class, students might work together in pairs. While one student acts as problem solver, talking aloud his/her thinking on how to solve a problem, the other student is an active listener, asking questions and helping the problem solver think through the process. Later, these students would exchange roles.
- In a first grade classroom, the teacher might engage students in a discussion of the reliability of evidence after reading them the story of Chicken Little. The teacher might lead this discussion by asking students whether the other animals should have trusted Chicken Little, and how they could have determined the truth or falsity of her story.
- After viewing a film on the Lewis and Clark expedition, a fifth grade teacher might ask students to work in pairs, listing the steps involved in planning and carrying out the expedition.
- Children of all ages can do team research. For example, elementary school children might investigate the effects of the gold rush on westward expansion, while secondary students might study the traffic flow in a major intersection of their community.

Thinking skills can even be taught in performance courses, such as band or woodworking. In band, students might be asked to think about how a piece would sound if the tempo or volume were changed. They might mark their scores with different tempos and volumes, then play the re-marked scores to hear the resulting differences in the music. Woodworking can be seen as a series of problems requiring solution. For example, instead of constructing a table by following a preset model, students might be encouraged to draw several ways of making a table (such as differing arrangements of legs or other supports, various tabletop shapes), and experiment with each design on small models, determining which are the most stable, pleasing to the student, and so on.

How Can Students' Thinking Skills Be Evaluated?

First, it's important to say that evaluating thinking skills is not the same as evaluating the number of words students spell correctly—students are not graded or

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birthdays, holidays, and other special events.

- Promote all types of letterwriting for your children—letters to the editor, letters for information on interests or hobbies, letters of praise or complaint to businesses.

Carry Out Writing Projects at Home

If your child is at a loss for something to do, especially during the summer or other vacation time, suggest a fun writing project.

- Write down your preschool child's words. For example, ask the child to tell you about a drawing; then you write the words below it. This gives the preschool child a sense of the function of words and their power to express personal thoughts.
- Play word games such as Scrabble and crossword puzzles. On trips, find the alphabet in license plates and tell riddles.
- Suggest ideas for special writing projects—younger children can make signs for their room or for a lemonade stand; older children can keep a diary, a journal, or a vacation notebook.

Offer to Help

Take the time to work with your children on school writing when they ask for help.

- Be willing to talk through ideas with children before they start to write. During this important thinking phase, a sympathetic ear helps.
- Be a booster. Let your child know what you think is delightful and well done in his or her writing. Parental praise is a powerful factor in motivating children.
- Don't overcriticize. Point out some writing errors to your child now and then. (Don't fix them yourself, however. Let the child rewrite the clumsy sentence or look up the correct spelling in the dictionary.)
- Remember that good writing means more than mere "correctness." Focus on what your child is trying to say rather than on the mechanics alone.
- Be patient. Competence in writing develops slowly and with practice.

Work with the School

Teachers need the partnership of parents. Your knowledge and support of the school program will be a major factor in your child's success.

- Learn about your child's classroom program. Find out what the teacher is trying to do in writing and ask how you can help at home.
- Discuss schoolwork with your children. Check to see if they have homework assignments.
- Have secondary schools urge all subject matter teachers, not only English teachers, to promote student writing in their classes.

To write well takes many years of hard work. Your understanding and encouragement can help your child immeasurably in becoming a skilled writer who enjoys the challenge of juggling all those words and thoughts on paper.

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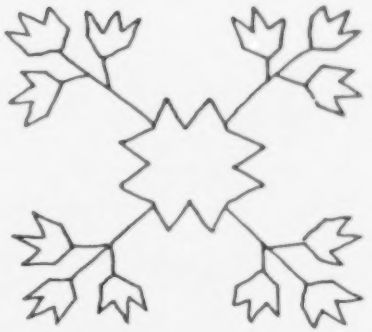
Writing: Parents Can Help

by Tim Gillespie



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Writing may be the most difficult thing your child can learn to do.

Writers have more things to keep in mind than a juggler has bowling pins to keep in the air. First, the writer must generate words to express the complex thoughts and feelings that humans have. Then he or she must transcribe the words on paper, creating complete sentences, organizing the sentences into paragraphs, keeping in mind the purpose of the writing and its audience, managing the content, figuring out how to express the ideas clearly and colorfully, spelling the words correctly, paying attention to the proper placement of commas and periods and capital letters, and focusing on many other details and rules.

Youngsters need a great deal of help in juggling all the learning involved in this complicated skill. As partners in the education of children, parents can do much in the home to support and encourage their children's success in learning to write well.

Here are some ideas and suggestions for parents to try with their children.

Fill Your Home with Talk

A child who is raised in an environment rich in words knows the power and joy of language.

- Talk with your child. Share your experiences, feelings, favorite stories, and memories.
- Listen when your child talks. Children must believe their words matter before they are willing to put them on paper.
- Encourage wordplay in your children—rhyming, role playing, and making up stories. These activities give children a sense of control over words.
- Provide a wide variety of experiences—trips to zoos, parks, museums, worksites, sports events, concerts—to enrich children's background, knowledge, and vocabulary.

Support Reading

Good writers are often good readers. Children who love books are usually hooked by the magic of writing.

- Read to your preschool child. Talk and ask questions about the books you read.
- Provide children of all ages with appropriate reading matter in the home. Take them to the library regularly. Give children's books and magazine subscriptions as gifts.
- Be a model. Let your child see you reading—the mail, a newspaper, a book, a recipe, or a set of instructions.

Provide a Writing Place

Writing requires a certain environment for concentration, as well as specific equipment.

- Furnish sufficient writing workspace with adequate lighting for your child, whether a desk or a cleared-off kitchen table.
- Set up a daily silent study time for writing and other schoolwork for your child. Regulate TV viewing hours.
- Supply children of all ages with writing materials—paper, pencils, pens. Stationery, stamps, and dictionaries are good gifts for students.

Set an Example

In the telephone and computer age, writing may seem like a lost and useless art to young people. Parents can help justify the need for learning to write well by showing children that writing is a part of their lives.

- Share your own writing with your children. Show them some personal, business, or consumer letters you write, as well as the responses you receive.
- Discuss with your child writing you do on your job—memos, purchase orders, business letters, or receipts. Children need to be convinced that writing has some application in the workaday world.

Communicate in Writing at Home

You can turn your home into a writing center by making writing a regular household medium of communication.

- Organize a chalkboard or bulletin board for written messages for all family members. Ask children to leave notes telling where they are going, to write down telephone messages, etc.
- Allow your child to be involved in family operations that require writing—lists for shopping of all kinds, instructions for babysitters, directions for visitors to your house, plans for birthday parties, and notes for school.

Encourage Letterwriting

Children need encouragement from their parents to write letters. This kind of writing is highly motivating because children receive replies to good letters.

- Have your children write thank-you letters for gifts they receive.
- Let children write and send invitations to birthday or other parties.
- Encourage children to write and draw cards to send to relatives and friends for